Voices on Wales' Welcome Ticket

– Reaffirming a Critical Need

Access to transport is fundamental to asylum seekers' experiences of integration and quality of life. We have found that access to transport can greatly improve mental health outcomes for this group. As such, we believe that improving asylum seekers' access to transport through the Welsh Government's Welcome Ticket, is an essential component of Wales becoming a true Nation of Sanctuary.

We conducted focus groups with refugees and asylum seekers from across Wales to understand their experiences of transport, impact upon their mental health, and what they would like to see in Wales. Through this document, we hope to share with you their thoughts, and reaffirm the need for free transport for asylum seekers in Wales.

A majority of Asylum Seekers in the UK do not have the right to work and instead depend upon £49.18 of asylum support per week to cover their needs. As such, transport is particularly difficult for this group to access. One participant said:

"You'd think you are free, but no, you are in prison because you don't have enough money, and you're not allowed to work. You can't even go anywhere because you'd have to pay."

Transport is critical to accessing a wide variety of services, integration support, and infrastructure. Amongst participants, people used transport to access education, volunteering, groceries, Home Office appointments, charity services, and to socialise. Another participant said:

"This is preventing you from going anywhere because it is very costly. You may say one fare... but all these things add up. You spend £10 or more per week. It's too much and transportation is very important, because it helps you to move from one place to another."

All participants noted not only an impact of their own quality of life from reduced access to transportation, but an impact for their children. One parent commented:

"When you can't get these things for your kids... it's more killing. There are things you can't explain to kids. They go to school and see other people doing things... They ask what is my own difference? You can't just keep on explaining what is asylum."

Low levels of asylum support make buying from budget supermarkets a necessity. Not all asylum seekers are within walking distance from suitable supermarkets, making affording transportation to access food an additional challenge. A participant from North Wales said:

The only supermarket we have here is very expensive. I would like to go to [the cheaper supermarkets] to get cheaper stuff, but I cannot go because I need to balance it with the price of the bus fare.

Transport is fundamental to be able to access and participate in activities that can provide enrichment and allow individuals to improve their mental health. Another participant from North Wales noted:

"Sometimes you want to visit friends, and you can't. Being an asylum seeker doesn't mean you should just stick to one place. It's good to move around and have a social life with other people. It helps as well with your mental health, instead of being at home all day, every day... That can worsen your mental health, so transportation is very important."

Those we spoke to re-affirm the importance of schemes such as the Welsh Government's Welcome Ticket, which can provide free transport to asylum seekers. The Welcome Ticket is a key element to achieving Welsh Government's Nation of Sanctuary ambitions. A participant from West Wales noted:

"Wales is a Sanctuary for asylum seekers. It's very famous in the UK for asylum seekers. I think if they have the ability to keep free bus tickets for low-income people or asylum seekers, that would be a good idea."

A parent based in South Wales spoke of how she felt the Welcome Ticket would improve her and her children's lives:

"If I happen to access free transport, I'll take my kids out for sightseeing. When they're on holiday, they would feel the impact of being on holiday. We are caged because I have to look at my purse before I can step out of the house."

Low rates of asylum support leave many asylum seekers making difficult choices on which necessities to go without. The Welsh Government's Welcome Ticket can reduce this financial burden on individuals and families. A participant said:

"I would love to dream of a subsidised transport system, where you wouldn't need to go hungry to be able to afford it"

As these lived experience voices have suggested, there is a great need for the Welcome Ticket within Wales. It allows for better access to services, socialisation and better integration outcomes. Through the Welcome Ticket, Welsh Government has the ability to greatly improve both quality of life and mental health for individuals in this group.

Each day the welcome ticket is not in place, asylum seekers are facing tough decisions, and their wellbeing is impacted. **We urge Welsh Government to prioritise the swift implementation of this vital scheme.**